Service Plan Engagement Summary Report:

What We Heard

TORONTO

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Acknowledgements

The Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) service plan team would like to express sincere gratitude to Karyn Dumble for her facilitation and leadership in our consultations. We would also like to thank SSHA's Service Plan Staff Advisory Committee and Steering Committee for their input and advice throughout the development and implementation of engagement activities, as well as the many staff across SSHA who supported stakeholder consultations. Lastly, thank you to the hundreds of participants who shared their thoughts and input.

Executive Summary

Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) is developing a new service plan to guide the planning, management and delivery of SSHA's services over a three-year period. SSHA's Service Plan will replace the 2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Plan and will build on SSHA's mission and move towards our shared vision where everyone has a safe and affordable place to call home. A key part of the process of developing the next Service Plan is engagement with partners and stakeholders. This report summarizes the feedback and key findings from the Service Plan engagement conducted between February and May 2021.

Input was gathered from more than 500 people over the course of the engagement for the service plan. Over 90 hours of active engagement were logged through an online survey, virtual engagement sessions and self-consultation kits between February and May 2021. Inputs from key partners and stakeholders (listed below) builds on the extensive public engagement conducted in the development of the HousingTO Plan, the City's 10-year housing and homelessness plan.

SSHA engaged partners from the following areas of the housing and homelessness service system:
- Affordable housing providers
- Social housing providers
- Supportive, transitional and alternative housing providers
- 24-hour service providers (shelters, respites and 24-hour drop-ins)
- Drop-in providers
- Housing access and supports service organizations
- Housing advocacy organizations
- Health and harm reduction service providers
- Street outreach providers
- People with lived experience of homelessness
- People staying in shelters
- Indigenous homelessness and housing providers
- Violence against women sector
- Youth-serving organizations
- Black-serving organizations
- SSHA staff

Dedicated engagement sessions were hosted with the following populations/groups:
- People with lived experience of homelessness
- Indigenous homelessness and housing providers
- Black-serving organizations
- Youth-serving organizations
- Violence against women sector

The Service Plan engagement is also complemented by the recent engagement of people experiencing homelessness through the 2021 Street Needs Assessment (SNA). Through the 2021 SNA, SSHA heard from more than 2,500 people experiencing homelessness, including people staying outdoors (including encampments), in City-administered shelters and motel/hotels (including COVID-19 response sites and the recovery site), in City-administered 24-hour respite sites (including 24-hour women's drop-ins and winter services in operation), and in provincially administered Violence Against Women shelters.

Engagement input was analyzed and summarized into themes that will inform the Service Plan priorities. A number of strategic-level themes arose throughout engagement with participants:

1. Housing affordability and supports
2. Housing opportunities for people experiencing homelessness
3. Pivot to housing
4. Prevention
5. Maintaining strong shelters
6. Focus on data, system tools and infrastructure
7. Better collaboration and partnerships
8. Supports for the sector
9. Engagement
10. Equity-based approach

Participants also shared input on which actions from the HousingTO Plan should be prioritized to help us work towards SSHA's divisional outcome statements. The input emphasized the importance of shifting investments toward developing permanent housing and housing programs; increasing supportive housing; and developing new prevention and shelter diversion approaches; providing person-centred, high quality and safe indoor space to people experiencing homelessness; and increasing partnerships with health service providers, including harm reduction and mental health service providers.

Lastly, respondents reviewed SSHA's 2021 budget breakdown and indicated the programs and funding areas that they would increase or decrease funding in order to meet the priorities identified in the next service plan. Most participants agreed that funding could be increased towards community housing, housing with supports and housing benefits. Participants were challenged by the discussion around which programs could receive reduced funding, as all services and programs were seen as critical or specialized services. There were a few key takeaways from the budgeting exercise, including the need for SSHA to explore innovative funding models that are flexible and promote sustainability and collaboration, and to look for efficiencies where other City divisions or levels of government may be better suited to fund certain programs.

The inputs from the service plan engagement will be an important contribution to the development of SSHA's service plan. We thank all participants for sharing their thoughts and ideas with us, and helping to shape the priorities for our service system over the next three years.

SSHA's Service Plan: Overview

Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) is developing a new service plan to guide the planning, management and delivery of SSHA's services over a three-year period. SSHA's Service Plan will replace the previous 2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Plan and will build on SSHA's mission and move towards our shared vision where everyone has a safe and affordable place to call home in the City of Toronto.

In addition to the points above, the purpose of the service plan is to:

- Identify specific actions needed to implement the objectives and outcomes in the City's 10-year housing and homelessness plan (HousingTO);
- Inform decision-making regarding funding decisions through the next round of grant funding applications in the fall;
- Inform a prioritization approach to connecting people experiencing homelessness to housing and supports; and
- Help stakeholders understand how the services they provide and/or use contribute to the shared goals and outcomes of Toronto's housing and homelessness system.

The next Service Plan will be aligned with the strategic directions in the Council approved HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan, Toronto's 10-year housing and homelessness plan, as well as the City of Toronto's Corporate Strategic Plan. The Service Plan will also fulfill Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy's program funding requirement to develop a community-wide plan for reducing homelessness.

A key part of the process of developing the next Service Plan is engagement with partners and stakeholders. This report summarizes the feedback and key findings from the Service Plan engagement process conducted between February and May 2021.

Engagement Process

Who We Engaged

Input was gathered from more than 500 people over the course of the engagement for the service plan, with over 90 hours of active engagement logged through online consultation methods between February and May 2021.

The major target audience of the engagement was our service provider partners and stakeholders involved in the delivery of homelessness services. We heard from a diverse audience of frontline staff, sector partners, community providers, service users, and people with lived experience of homelessness. The range of participants included:

- Affordable housing providers
- Social housing providers
- Supportive, transitional and alternative housing providers
- 24-hour service providers (shelters, respites and 24-hour drop-ins)
- Drop-in providers
- Housing access and supports service organizations
- Housing advocacy organizations
- Health and harm reduction service providers
- Street outreach providers
- People with lived experience of homelessness
- People staying in shelters
- Indigenous homelessness and housing providers
- Violence Against Women sector
- Youth-serving organizations
- Black-serving organizations
- SSHA staff

Inputs from these key partners and stakeholders builds on the extensive public engagement conducted in the development of the HousingTO Plan, the City's 10-year housing and homelessness plan. It is also complemented by the recent engagement of people experiencing homelessness through the 2021 Street Needs Assessment (SNA).

Through the 2021 SNA, SSHA heard directly from more than 2,500 people experiencing homelessness, including people staying outdoors (including encampments), in City-administered shelters and motel/hotels (including COVID-19 response sites and the recovery site) and in City-administered 24-hour respite sites (including 24-hour women's drop-ins and winter services in operation). The 2021 results will inform SSHA's next service plan as well as policy and program development. Previous Streets Needs

Assessment results have helped to improve program and service delivery, such as working toward the development of an Indigenous funding stream with a 20% allocation of grants funding, the creation of an LGBTQ2S youth shelter, and increased resources for shelter programming for seniors. The full SNA results report will be shared in October 2021 at the same time as the Service Plan.

A number of additional inputs will also be incorporated into the development of the Service Plan, including feedback gathered through SSHA's Interim Shelter Recovery Strategy process, the City's plan for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in the homelessness service system, as well as the findings of Toronto Shelter Network's (TSN) six-month study, "Meeting Crisis with Opportunity – Re-Imagining Toronto's Shelter System". The TSN summary report identifies recommendations that can improve the delivery of housing and homelessness services and supports for people in Toronto; build capacity and infrastructure for future waves of COVID-19 and other emergencies; and inform the permanent transition of the shelter system into one that is people-centered and housing focused. Central to this report are the experiences of shelter users and diverse populations using Toronto's shelter system during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as those who moved into hotels and those that remained in legacy shelters and respites.

How We Engaged

A range of engagement activities were designed and implemented in two phases to suit the needs of participants and to maximize the quality and quantity of feedback, while following all COVID-19 guidance by using virtual engagement methods.

The first phase of engagement was an online survey which sought input from frontline staff, sector partners and service providers. The survey was administered through the City of Toronto's CheckMarket online survey platform and took approximately 15 minutes to complete on average. The survey was live from late February to early March 2021.

The second stage of engagement was a series of virtual engagement sessions, which built on the information gathered from the survey. At the virtual engagement sessions, participants provided further input on SSHA's outcomes, actions and funding priorities. These sessions provided participants with the opportunity for in-depth elaboration and discussion.

Lastly, a self-consultation kit was made available for groups interested in working through the facilitation questions and providing feedback independently or with support from SSHA staff. This method was used to help decrease barriers to participation for groups that may otherwise have been unable to participate in the engagement process.

The table below summarizes the various types of consultation activities undertaken over the course of the project with the dates for each group or sector.

Table 1. Summary of Consultation Activities

Engagement Type	Group/Sector	Date (2021)
Online Survey	N/A	March – April
Virtual Engagement Sessions	SSHA staff	April 14 – May 12
	Toronto Indigenous Community Advisory Board	April 19
	Violence Against Women sector	April 20
	Youth serving organizations	April 23
	People With Lived Experience	April 26 – 28
	Open	May 4 – 10
	Black serving organizations	May 10
	Scarborough-specific session	May 14
	Prioritization-focused session	June 3
Self-Consultation Kits	Submitted by 3 organizations	April - May

Online Survey

An online survey was developed to gather input from staff, sector partners and service providers on the actions and funding priorities that should be included in the service plan. The survey consisted of a set of questions on these topics as well as a set of background questions to understand who was responding to the survey.

The survey was circulated to a wide range of stakeholder groups and sector specific networks who are engaged in housing and homelessness initiatives, including:

- Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness
- Toronto Indigenous Community Advisory Board
- Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council
- Toronto Shelter Network
- Toronto Drop-In Network
- SSHA's 24-hour service providers (shelters, respites and 24-hour drop-ins)
- SSHA's grant funded programs and social housing providers
- SSHA staff
- Violence Against Women sector table

With a total of 247 completed surveys, nearly 50% of the total engagement count (approximately 550) came from online surveys. A highlight of the sectors and roles of survey respondents is provided below, while the key findings have been integrated with the virtual engagement data and reported thematically in the "What We Heard" section to follow.

Of the 247 respondents:

- 68% (n=167) were non-City staff and 32% (n=80) were SSHA staff
- Of the 167 non-City staff respondents, the following sectors were represented (respondents could choose more than one response):
    o Affordable housing provision (31%)
    o Social housing provision (28%)
    o Other supports (employability, legal, health, food, etc.) (28%)
    o Shelter/24-hour Drop-in/24-Hour Respite (28%)
    o Housing Access and Support Services (26%)
    o Advocacy (26%)
    o Provision of housing with supports/Alternative housing/Supports to Daily Living (25%)
    o Drop-in service (19%)
    o Harm reduction/overdose prevention (17%)
    o System supports or sector networks (16%)
    o Other (11%)
    o Street outreach (7%)
- Of the 80 SSHA respondents, staff represented the following sections:
    o Homeless Initiatives and Prevention (50%)
    o Housing Stability Services (29%)
    o Prefer not to answer (9%)
    o Service Planning and Integrity (6%)
    o Infrastructure, Planning and Development (6%)
    o General Manager's Office (3%)

Virtual Engagement Sessions

Fifteen virtual engagement sessions were held with a diverse group of stakeholders representing sectors of Toronto's homelessness and housing using a combination of open and targeted sessions. All sessions took place between April and early June. Details on the sessions, target groups, dates and participation are outlined in Table 1.

The purpose of the sessions were to:

- Introduce the Service Plan including an overview of its development, strategic direction and alignment, engagement process and timelines.

- Give participants the opportunity to provide input on outcomes, actions and funding priorities that will inform the Service Plan through facilitated discussion activities.
- Provide information about next steps and self-consultation methods.

Virtual engagement sessions were facilitated by Karyn Dumble from The Monarch Park Group in order to provide a professional and consistent facilitation approach across the series of for all the sessions. Sessions were also supported by a number of SSHA staff. Each session was 2 hours long and had a maximum capacity of were capped at approximately 50 people per session to ensure time and space for meaningful participation.

A project 'overview' slide deck as well as the engagement survey results were provided to all participants 1-2 days in advance of the session.

At the beginning of the meeting, SSHA staff gave a presentation introducing the Service Plan which included an overview of its development, strategic direction and alignment, engagement process and timelines.

The session consisted of three activities comprised of nine discussion questions in total. During the sessions, feedback was obtained through:
- Input and notes during discussions and breakout group work were recorded by SSHA staff note takers using Google Jamboard. Participants were also able to add their notes directly to the Jamboard, which was viewable to all participants as a tool to provide input and follow along in the discussion.
- A Slido poll was used to track the results to two questions regarding funding priorities.

Self-consultation Kits

A self-consultation kit was developed and distributed to a range of stakeholders and partners as part of the service plan engagement. The purpose of the kit was to provide an alternative method of input for individuals or groups and to improve access to participation for those who may not have been able to participate through other methods.

The kit contained instructions, discussion questions and a workbook for users to work through individually or as a group. Participants were asked to submit their input electronically. In total, three organizations submitted their input through this method.

Feedback Collection and Analysis Methodologies

Data Collection

Feedback was collected through the following methods, as shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Data Collection Tools

Engagement Types	Collection Method
Online Survey	• City of Toronto's CheckMarket online survey platform
Virtual Engagement Sessions	• Sticky notes using Google Jamboard • Virtual engagement summaries • Slido poll results
Self-consultation Kits	• Self-consultation kit workbook

Data Storage

All data from the online survey and the self-consultation kits were collected and stored by SSHA staff. Raw feedback and attendance from the virtual engagement sessions were collected and stored by Karyn Dumble, which was sent to the SSHA service plan team following each session.

Data Analysis

Survey results were quantitatively analyzed by the SSHA service plan team. The results of the survey were used to inform the development of the virtual engagement session questions, and were also synthesized and integrated in this report.

Raw data from the virtual engagement sessions and self-consultation kits were analyzed and coded thematically after all of the input were gathered. Qualitative codes such as "housing affordability", "service access" and "system stewardship" were used to generate the high-level themes summarized in the next section.

What We Heard

This section summarizes the main themes that arose throughout the engagement process. It provides an overview of the overarching strategic and system-level themes, as well as feedback in relation to SSHA's divisional outcome statements and budget priorities, which were focal points throughout the engagement process. This section also presents insights that are contextually unique to specific populations and stakeholder groups.

1. Strategic Themes

1.1 Housing Affordability and Supports

Several themes that arose throughout the Service Plan engagement were consistent with existing themes from HousingTO, the City's 10-year housing and homelessness plan. While the Service Plan engagement process aimed to capture and reflect all input from stakeholders, some of the resulting themes that emerged are directly addressed in HousingTO and may not be in scope for the Service Plan.

The following feedback is consistent with existing themes from HousingTO:

Housing affordability

An overwhelming theme heard throughout the engagement was the issue of housing affordability in Toronto. With the City's increase in housing and living costs outpacing rising incomes, participants were clear that the City's definition of affordability needs to be revised and that this new definition should be implemented throughout the system. They expressed that "affordability" should be income-based, rather than tied to average market rents (AMR), as currently AMRs are difficult to access even for those at the middle-income level. Currently, work is underway to address this HousingTO action, which is being undertaken by City Planning with support by the Housing Secretariat and SSHA as supporting partners.

Income support

Housing affordability is particularly challenging for those who are at the lower end of the income spectrum and/or are experiencing homelessness. These groups may rely on income supports such as Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), which do not accurately reflect the true cost of living, in order to access housing. HousingTO advocates to the Province to increase social assistance rates to reflect the high cost of housing.

Housing supply

Participants expressed that Toronto's lack of a safe and affordable housing supply was a major cause of concern. Participants felt that the lack of housing stock and availability

were serious barriers for the ability to house people currently experiencing homelessness. A range of housing options should be available on a continuum (i.e., private market, supportive, transitional, modular, etc.) to meet the needs of low-income households and a variety of supports needs.

Purchasing or creating population-specific housing was also discussed as a way to meet the needs of specific groups (e.g. youth, people coming from corrections, Indigenous people). Participants called for a concrete strategy to increase housing supply through a number of ways, such as building partnerships with private sectors (e.g. developers and landlords), advocating to other levels of government for investments in affordable housing development, advocating for the implementation of inclusionary zoning and other planning-generated affordable units (e.g. using Section 37 funds), and expropriating vacant land and converting existing government-owned assets into housing.

Many of these actions are underway in support of the HousingTO Plan targets and through the Council approved 24-Month Housing and Homelessness Plan. Participants noted that more housing and properties should come under the City's portfolio with the ability to control new and converted assets.

State of Good Repair

An important theme discussed was around the importance of prioritizing the state-of-good-repair of the City's existing housing stock. This aligns with the HousingTO recommendation that investments need to be made for capital repairs and maintenance, and to ensure housing is kept high-quality, clean and safe.

Housing benefits

Stakeholders advocated for housing benefits to be flexible and portable, long-term, and open to a wider audience. It was suggested that referral sources should be expanded, which would require an increased number of benefits. This aligns with an intergovernmental ask in the HousingTO plan.

1.2 Housing Opportunities for People Experiencing Homelessness

Participants expressed the urgency for more supportive and transitional housing for people experiencing homelessness. To this end, participated noted the importance of having more than one housing option available, rather than a single choice, as a factor in promoting housing stability.

Participants put a strong emphasis on the need to engage with private sector landlords to create new opportunities and connections to housing for clients experiencing homelessness or affordability issues. It was recommended that landlord engagement be

a priority for both increasing housing supply and improving housing stability for those experiencing tenancy issues that puts them at risk of homelessness.

Many participants also brought up the City's long waitlist for rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing, which averages 7-12 years depending on the type of unit being sought. Participants recommended that the City implement income and asset limits on RGI recipients to ensure that subsidized units are going to those who have a verified need. They also suggested that more effective eligibility reviews occur and that SSHA provide stronger oversight of housing providers to support them in addressing potential eligibility and non-compliance issues. These recommendationsa align with the Auditor General's report from October 2019, "Safeguarding Rent-Geared-to-Income Assistance: Ensuring Only Eligible People Benefit"[1], the recommendations of which, participants agreed, should be prioritized and fully implemented.

Housing benefits

Housing benefits were seen as an important instrument for opening up pathways to housing. Many participants had ideas for how existing and new programs could be maximized to improve their impact and increase affordability for Torontonians. It should also be noted that a common point was made around the need to increase the housing supply and availability of units in order for housing benefits to be effective.

Improving the accessibility of housing benefits was also a point of convergence among stakeholders throughout engagement. Many participants noted the success of a portable model in the rollout of the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit, and expressed that future housing benefit programs should follow a similar framework.
A resounding theme was that service providers and clients alike are challenged to understand what housing benefits they may be eligible for and how they can access the right benefit. Participants suggested that a centralized information and access system be created for all housing benefits. This would help streamline and clarify eligibility and ultimately lead to quicker access to benefits, which is needed in order for clients to secure housing in a fast-paced rental market. They also recommended better coordination and integration of eligibility requirements with other City-administered benefits such as OW or ODSP, which would create more efficiency in the process and reduce the administrative burden on applicants.

Lastly, stakeholders voiced that decisions about housing benefits should be data-driven, and that prioritization should be based on need indicated through data. Housing benefit programs also need to be evaluated to better understand how they are working and for whom, which can then better inform program decisions and improvements.

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[1] https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2019/au/bgrd/backgroundfile-138908.pdf#xd_co_f=MjA0LjE4Ny42Ny4yNy00MDI4MzQzNjE2LjMwNjEwNzA0~

1.3 Pivot to Housing

A focus on permanent housing solutions to homelessness and a "pivot to housing" have arisen in the context of COVID-19 and has been an underlying theme in the development of the service plan. The Interim Shelter Recovery Strategy, the City's 12-month housing and homelessness COVID-19 recovery plan, highlighted the critical importance of continuing and expanding the focus on permanent housing solutions to homelessness through the recovery and rebuild phases of the pandemic. This requires a shift from an overreliance on emergency responses towards longer term housing solutions. A variety of stakeholder input gathered throughout the service plan engagement builds on this idea.

Converting shelter to housing

While the importance of keeping adequate shelter capacity and space was discussed in many sessions, a recurring theme was the need to identify shelters that can be converted into housing. Stakeholders would like to see more shelters that could be converted into transitional housing or housing with supports. This could provide clients with more housing options and allow more seamless transition from shelters to housing. The conversion of shelters into housing would create flow in shelters and open up capacity for those who require emergency shelter.

Supporting transitions to housing

Participants also brought forward the need for all shelters to consistently be able to offer housing-focused supports to their clients. Concerns were shared about how only some shelters and respites have housing workers on site while others do not. Participants suggested that a focus on fully implementing the New Shelter Service Model (NSSM) at all sites would help increase the availability and quality of housing supports. This in turn could lead to improved client housing outcomes across the system. They also noted that substantial resources would need to be earmarked to achieve broad implementation of the model.

Range of supports

In order to support clients in successful transitions to housing, many participants provided input on the nature and range of supports that should be available across the shelter system. There was agreement that above all, supports need to be client-focused and individualized to each person's needs and circumstances. Stakeholders shared that clients should be connected to supports as soon as they are in the shelter system and those supports should be maintained as they transition into housing. Adequate mental health, harm reduction, wrap around and follow up supports are key to helping clients stay housed. Notably, many participants urged the need for harm reduction supports to be prioritized in all shelters. The importance of relationship and community supports were also discussed as an important factor in preventing returns to homelessness.

Importantly, participants voiced the need for dedicated funds for support workers to assist homeless individuals to become housed and also to develop the tools to remain housed. Population-specific supports that are culturally- and developmentally-appropriate are also needed.

Rapid Re-Housing Initiative

Many participants discussed the potential of the Rapid Re-Housing Initiative (RRHI), a program that was launched in April 2020 by the City of Toronto and Toronto Community Housing to identify vacancies to be made available immediately to people experiencing homelessness in Toronto. The program is available to people who are experiencing chronic homelessness who are on the centralized waiting list and are staying in an emergency overnight space or living outdoors and working with Streets to Homes. Many stakeholders expressed how successful this program had been in housing their clients. They voiced their support for the program and the continued need to streamline and prioritize housing access for those who are currently living in shelters, especially those who have been long-time shelter residents.

Landlord engagement

Stakeholders also discussed the importance of improving engagement with both non-profit and private market landlords. Increasing the connections to landlords who provide safe, quality rental housing and would accept referrals from the shelter system would provide another pathway for shelter clients to transition into housing. Participants expressed that they would like to see a centralized database of landlords who would accept referrals from the shelter system, along with consistent and coordinated processes used for referrals. There should also be quality assurance mechanisms in place to ensure standardized practices amongst landlords.

1.4 Prevention

Homelessness prevention was seen as a key priority across the service system and received support from many stakeholders. There was agreement that eviction prevention, shelter diversion and housing stability services should be offered early with an upstream approach, prior to when an eviction or the need for emergency shelter is imminent. Prevention initiatives such as tenant supports, rent banks and eviction prevention programs were all seen as crucial components of a comprehensive prevention strategy, all of which require dedicated funding.

A robust homelessness prevention strategy also requires effective system planning with sectors that intersect with and contribute to homelessness. Enhanced coordination and planning with health care, mental health, justice, corrections and child welfare systems are central in understanding the various pathways into homelessness and how we can create specialized approaches to intervene before people become homelessness.

1.5 Maintaining Strong Shelters

The importance of maintaining a strong emergency shelter system was shared among many participants. Despite the recent rise in attention towards building permanent housing solutions, there was recognition of the vital role of emergency shelters to help people meet their basic needs during a crisis.

Ensuring adequate shelter capacity was seen as one of the most crucial issues facing the shelter system. The enhanced stress on the system due to the COVID-19 pandemic response and the need to create physical distancing in shelters also highlighted instances where people may not have been able to access a shelter bed that met their immediate needs. Participants said that they would like to see enough shelter capacity for all of those who seek shelter when needed. As previously discussed, providing long-term shelter users with opportunities to move into housing may provide some much needed flow in the system and open up space for those who require emergency shelter.

The use of hotel spaces throughout the pandemic response gave rise to conversations regarding the physical design of shelters. Participants felt that individual hotel rooms provided more dignified and safe spaces for clients and discouraged a return to dormitory-style sleeping arrangements post-pandemic.

Upholding and implementing the City's Shelter Standards was a priority shared by most participants in order to achieve safe, high quality shelters. To implement the standards, shelter providers need to be properly resourced to support clients and train staff. Implementation of the shelter standards should also be reviewed with regular quality assurance visits. In terms of the physical brick and mortar sites, stakeholders agreed that existing shelters should be renovated, properly maintained and provided with additional resources for capital repairs.

Shelter safety was a strong theme among engagement participants. Participants felt that increasing the safety of BIPOC and LGBTQ2S+ clients and staff should be a shelter service priority. Wherever possible, programming and services specialized for these communities should also be pursued to promote safe, high-quality and equity-based services.

Among staff, safety was described in relation to feelings of mental wellbeing. Participants expressed a number of ways to improve the working conditions that impact staff mental health, citing burnout as a major issue amongst staff. Suggestions included ensuring access to mental health resources and addressing the pay disparity between City-run and partner-run shelters.

1.6 Focus on Data, System Tools and Infrastructure

There was pronounced agreement amongst stakeholders that SSHA should take a stronger lead in advancing data infrastructure in both the homelessness and housing systems. Participants called for enhanced guidance and strategy on what data SSHA and its partners should be collecting, and how we can use the data to inform decisions (e.g. modifying or creating new programs). In particular, participants noted that the highlights and trends from the Street Needs Assessment should be used for decision-making and policy development.

The launch of the City's Shelter System Flow dashboard was seen as a positive step in terms of aggregate data sharing as it provides a tangible and useful public data source. The topic generated excitement among participants about how the dashboard could be used to display year-over-year reductions in homelessness or provide insights around returns into homelessness, and the impact this type of information will have on policy and program development. Participants expressed interest in building a similar dashboard for housing benefits, as access to information about various benefits and their usage remains a challenge.

Participants would also like to see an investment towards increasing the sector's capacity for data sharing through training and networking. While aggregate data sharing was seen as a great resource, there was also a need to enhance data infrastructure and capacity at the site-level to help inform service delivery.

A focus on improving the Shelter Management Information System (SMIS) was a key point for enhancing the sector's data infrastructure. Participants noted that not all agencies use SMIS to track clients (some use alternative data systems), which creates gaps in the system. They recommended the entire homeless service system use one system in order to track all client information cohesively. Participants also highlighted the importance of providing resources and training for all shelter staff to be adequately trained on SMIS. Further, stakeholder suggested continuing to build on recent improvements to SMIS to ensure we can collect the right information to enhance service outcomes. It was recommended that service users continue to be engaged in future SMIS enhancements. Participants also discussed the need for the implementation of a common assessment tool in order to better understand the supports required to keep clients housed and a rapid assessment tool that prioritizes diversion as a first option. The development of a common assessment tool was identified as an action in HousingTO and is currently in development by SSHA's Coordinated Access team.

1.7 Better Collaboration and Partnerships

The importance of building stronger partnerships and collaboration was a common theme heard throughout the engagement. First, this applied in terms of intergovernmental advocacy, where time and resources are needed to negotiate with other levels of government for funding alignment and provide a clear, consistent path for funds. Many participants also spoke of the need to work closely with other government stakeholders on regional approaches to funding and the delivery of housing and

homelessness services. This would also aid in reducing silos between municipal service managers.

Second, this applied to collaboration among service providers and between the housing and homelessness service sector and other sectors, such as health and corrections. Partnerships and enhanced coordination at the service level can improve service access and coordinated case management for clients. Collaboration with other sectors such as health and corrections can help divert people from entering homelessness by providing coordinated and adequate support services, such as discharge planning.

Stakeholders also voiced that the City should build stronger partnerships with non-profit organizations, and leverage those partnerships as non-profit organizations may offer more than just operational functions. Respect for the experiential knowledge of the non-profit sector was key.

One theme that arose was around collaboration and partnership and how it could be fostered through the way local funding decisions are made. It was suggested that the City consider more collaborative approaches that reduce competition between organizations in the sector. Participants also noted the opportunity to deepen collaboration and coordination among different funders (e.g. the City and United Way). Another point of discussion around the funding was need to explore methods and models of funding through a more sustainable lens; as one participant noted, "SSHA needs to fund smarter and more proactively". Rather than working within a funding environment of scarcity, participants suggested that we start to think about circular economies and seed funding as a way to maximize community benefits and foster innovation.

As previously mentioned, stakeholders also identified that landlords, in both non-profit and private sector, are key partners in the housing system. Landlords are important in helping prevent homelessness by identifying households that may need eviction prevention supports before a crisis point occurs, and they are also impactful by way of securing housing for people experiencing homelessness.

1.8 Supports for the Sector

Participants spoke about the need to increase availability of information, resources, and services available for the sector. Many stakeholders reported that better access to this information would improve the service and referrals that they provide. It was suggested that there should be greater awareness of information of all available 24-hour hour services and the resources should be more useful and accessible.

Another theme arose around providing the sector with adequate supports for training. With staff turnover being a prominent issue among frontline service provision, proper training for staff is very important. This could be supported by regularly updating sector-

wide training materials and conducting annual reviews to update and standardize central resources.

1.9 Engagement

Many participants expressed the need for ongoing, meaningful engagement among City staff, divisions, clients and service providers to support ongoing planning, program and partnership development. Staff and service providers have important first-hand knowledge and expertise that can help identify service gaps and emerging needs. The importance of increasing the opportunities for engaging with clients and people with lived experience of homelessness came to the forefront of many conversations. One Indigenous partner shared that the notion of "nothing about us without us" applies to people who use services as well.

1.10 Equity-based Approach

In line with the approach to COVID-19 recovery, stakeholders spoke of the importance of embedding an equity-focused and racial justice lens into all future planning and noted that this should be a focal point for the next service plan.

Participants specifically voiced that data from the Street Needs Assessment about overrepresented and disproportionately affected groups experiencing homelessness should be used to drive decision making and funding allocations. Furthermore, evidence-based, equity-focused responses need to be utilized for overrepresented populations.

2. Population-specific Themes

In a number of dedicated engagement sessions held, stakeholders representing specific populations shared the priorities they saw as important for their communities. This feedback is summarized in the section below.

People with lived experience of homelessness

Current and former shelter clients with lived experience of homelessness provided essential input during the service plan engagement. In terms of their experiences as service users, participants discussed how people using shelter services are already put under a lot of pressure, which can be exacerbated by overcrowding and discomfort with the shelter environment. For this reason, service provision needs to start from a place of compassion and care for clients.

A strong theme formed around the need for clients to build a sense of purpose during their shelter stay. Participants shared their support for having opportunities to feel connected to the community and contribute to a positive living environment. For example, clients suggested that getting residents involved with helping to improve the

living space, cleaning and connecting with others could help contribute to their motivation and mental health. Participants also suggested that shelter staff run monthly meetings with residents as a way to connect with clients, understand their interests and goals and to collectively progress towards those goals.

Participants also spoke of the need for more people with lived or living experience or peers in shelter staff or volunteer positions. Having opportunities to connect with people who have been through the shelter system and can share about their experience was important to participants. These connections help them in preparing to transition to housing and also can create a network to support them in keeping their housing. Participants expressed their interest in a program that would train peers who have been housed to come back into shelters to share and connect.

From a service navigation perspective, clients also shared that better clarification of the services available and the process to access those services was needed. As one client noted, "a little more visibility and transparency would go a long way". Similar to other stakeholders, a specific suggestion was to create a single portal or dashboard where all services and supports were listed, such as shelter wait times, housing benefit options, and Toronto Community Housing waitlist times. This type of resource should be made available to clients in addition to housing workers. Finally, the importance of continuous engagement and consultation with the communities served was seen as an essential driver of service improvement and accountability.

Indigenous homelessness and housing providers

Indigenous partners shared many ideas for how the service plan could support Indigenous housing and homelessness providers as well as the communities they serve.

At a service-level, participants shared that relationships should be at the core of the services they provide, and that these relationships start by speaking to clients to understand their paths and where they came from in order to better understand what their needs are. Participants spoke of the barriers their clients face in finding and accessing the services they require. They recommended specifically funding system navigator roles as well as hub-type models that use a "one-stop shop" approach to connecting clients with shelter, housing and supports. The importance of supporting Indigenous organizations to provide integral supports and housing options across a continuum was key, as was a focus on funding for culturally-based supports.

Indigenous partners also shared important insights about how to better work together with the City and other levels of government. There was a recommendation brought forward to create an Indigenous Homelessness Taskforce that would be specifically responsible for creating and implementing a cohesive working profile to address Indigenous homelessness with the City of Toronto and Indigenous agencies. At the intergovernmental level, Indigenous partners called for the City to work together with

provincial and federal tables, rather than compete with them, on how to provide support for the Indigenous community. Participants also reinforced the need for all levels of government to advocate for and work together on delivering a national Indigenous Housing Strategy.

An overarching priority was the importance of building self-determination into all of the funding to the Indigenous sector. Continuing to collaborate and work together on allocations to Indigenous people, such as with housing benefit programs, should be a continued partnership model.

Black-serving organizations

Engagement with Black-led and Black-serving organizations led to important recommendations on how to better serve Black clients. A major theme discussed was the prevalence of anti-Black racism experienced in shelters and in housing. Participants felt that Black clients within the shelter system do not get the same quality of service and face more barriers in getting housed. A strategy is needed to address the discrimination against Black clients in shelter and in housing. Participants also voiced that the City's Confronting Anti-Black Racism actions that pertain to shelter and housing be implemented and included in the service plan.

Participants discussed that it is well-known that Black individuals are overrepresented in the shelter system, however they voiced the need for race-based data to be collected consistently and utilized, in partnership with communities, to understand and better address the needs of Black clients.

Other ways to improve the safety and experience of Black clients included providing safe and supportive services at low-barrier and respite programs, where Black clients are particularly overrepresented, and to increase the hiring of diverse staff who speak more languages to promote inclusion and better access to services.

Participants also noted that collaboration and coordination between Black-serving agencies could be better supported and improved, which would better enable them to provide subject matter expertise around policy and program development for the City. Participants also called for supports to empower Black-led organizations to provide access to culturally-appropriate models of service to the populations they support. As an example, one agency spoke about the work they do in developing rapport with people from the correctional community in order to share resources about shelter, housing and supports that are available to them when exiting the system.

Youth-serving organizations

Youth-serving organizations provided important advice on how to best support the sector to meet the needs of youth experiencing homelessness. A key point shared was that the unique needs of the youth sector should be recognized as stated by one

participant, "youth should not be an extension of general homelessness programs". A focus on upstream approaches, such as prevention and diversion, are all the more important for those who are at risk of becoming homeless at an early age. The need for youth-specific solutions was also discussed, such as developmentally appropriate wrap arounds supports and the availability of specialized transitional and supportive housing options for youth.

In terms of supports for the sector, participants advocated for multi-year funding programs for the youth sector, as single-year funding was described as a barrier for bringing in clients and hiring or retaining staff. Lastly, stakeholders called on SSHA to work together with other levels of government to advocate for a national youth homelessness program.

Violence against women (VAW) sector

Representatives from the violence against women's (VAW) sector shared insight into the particular needs of their clients. In terms of service provision, participants discussed having trauma-informed services available and training for staff. Above all, the safety of clients whether in shelters or once housed was a point of emphasis. Participants also expressed that having distinct shelters for survivors of abuse was key, which falls under a Provincial government mandate. VAW stakeholders also called for efforts to be put towards addressing eligibility barriers faced by women using VAW services who need to access housing programs (e.g. RGI, housing benefits, etc.). In general, stakeholders would like to see strengthened coordination and information sharing between SSHA and the VAW sector in order to build connections and networks that will move clients into housing faster.

3. Outcomes, Measures and Actions

Results-based accountability (RBA) is being used to plan, measure and show the impact we make in the lives of people in our communities. It guides the City's budget process and it is how the City communicates performance to service users, community partners and our many other stakeholders.

In 2020, SSHA adopted RBA to better tell the story of how our work across the division contributes to SSHA's outcomes and the City's goals. It also helps us to understand the difference we make in the lives of the people we serve and for our communities as a whole.

An important first step was to identify strategic outcome statements that we can use to align and focus RBA methods across the division. These strategic outcome statements are the desired results or ends we would like to achieve at a population level. The three strategic outcome statements of SSHA are:

1. The experience of homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring.

2. People experiencing homelessness in Toronto have access to safe, high quality emergency shelters that offer housing-focused supports.
3. Low-income households have access to housing benefit programs that provide affordability and stability.

Throughout the service plan engagement process, we asked stakeholders to provide input on how these outcome statements would work for the service plan and what it would look like to achieve these strategic outcome statements. We also asked stakeholders to share input on which actions from HousingTO should be prioritized to help us work towards each of these outcome statements. The input for each of the outcome statements are summarized in the tables below.

Outcome Statement #1: The experience of homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring.
Top milestones and measures needed to achieve this outcome statement:

Prevention:

- Overall reduction in the number of people coming into the shelter system
- Reduction in the number of people entering homelessness from other jurisdictions, corrections, health system, or evictions

Emergency shelter use:

- People are able to access emergency shelter beds when they require them
- The shelter system is used for emergencies only
- The need for congregate settings is decreased
- Number of people accessing shelter is reduced
- Reduction in length of stay in the shelter system, in addition to the time between first intake/admission in the system and becoming housed
- Reduction in the number of people returning to shelters from housing
- Reduction in the total number of 24-hour respite sites
- Tracking overall shelter inflow vs. outflow in order to achieve "Functional Zero"

Chronic homelessness:

- Number of people experiencing chronic homelessness is reduced
- Assign a target for the percentage of chronically homeless population to be housed by 2025

Housing:

- Each year, narrow the gap between housing need and availability by "x"%
- Year-by-year increase in the number of people moving from shelters into housing
- People have a choice in housing options that are high-quality

- There are available housing options to support a diversity of needs available for people experiencing homelessness with no wait time
- People have access to housing options in geographic areas that they want to and need to live in
- People are happy with their housing and feel safe and welcome
- People recently housed have maintained their housing for "x" period of time
- People have the supports they need to maintain their housing

Other measures:

- There are no more people sleeping outdoors
- Focus is on quality outcomes and not the number of "beds" filled
- Quality of life improves for service users
- People who have experienced homelessness feel a greater sense of hope in their housing journeys

How we can track progress:

- Shelter system flow dashboards
- Data from the Street Needs Assessments
- Tracking client data using SMIS
- Tracking client data through Coordinated Access and By-name List
- Consultation and feedback from service providers and service users

Feedback on Outcome Statement #1:

- "Rare", "brief" and "non-recurring" need to be clarified, defined and agreed upon by partners
- Define and establish how rare (prevalence), brief (length of homelessness), and non-recurring (returns to shelter) are being measured, and what measure would equate to success?
- Is this realistic in the timeframe of the Service Plan?
- How will individuals not in the system (SMIS) be tracked?
- Shouldn't we be preventing homelessness?
- Missing the client/person's perspective or point of view

Top actions to achieve this outcome statement identified through survey and virtual engagement sessions:		
1. Complete Toronto City Council's capital plan to provide an additional 1,000 shelter beds and shift all future capital investments toward developing permanent housing	2. Pilot supportive housing opportunities in partnership with other levels of government and the non-profit housing sector to increase supportive housing stock	3. Develop and implement new eviction prevention and shelter diversion services and strategies

Outcome Statement #2: People experiencing homelessness in Toronto have access to safe, high quality emergency shelters that offer housing-focused supports.

Top milestones and measures needed to achieve this outcome statement:

Shelter access:

- Better understand who isn't able to access shelter spaces and why (e.g. couch surfing, encampments, etc.)
- People requiring a shelter bed will be able to immediately access a bed
- The number of available shelter spaces will accommodate the number of individuals who call seeking shelter
- Achieve a maximum 10-minute wait time for all calls to Central Intake
- Examine the reasons why clients decline shelter spaces through Central Intake data
- Track how many clients are turned away because there are no beds available
- No longer a need for 24-hour respite sites, winter programs or other pressure-related pop-up services

Shelter safety and quality:

- Increased focus on client comfort and safety, noting that safety looks different for everyone (physical, mental, emotional)
- Reduction in the number of incident reports
- Meeting all Toronto Public Health requirements
- Tracking customer service data, including the number and type of complaints and follow-up actions
- Tracking client satisfaction and experiences in the shelter system. We will know when this is achieved when clients confirm that shelters are safe and high-quality.
- By 2025 we will have implemented all capital repairs necessary to reach a good state of repair in emergency shelter spaces

Housing-focused supports:

- Increase in the number of people who are moving out of the shelter into permanent housing
- Decrease in the number of people who are returning to shelters after being housed
- Decrease in wait times tor social housing and other housing benefits
- Housing focused supports are available to everyone as soon as they are in shelter
- Collect data on and increase client connections to resources, services, needs, essentials, etc. Be able to share that data with other organizations
- Increase the number of landlord relationships established
- Ensure all shelters have adequate funding to support their clients to get into housing

How we can track progress:

- Gather feedback from clients and staff (e.g. snapshot surveys, action committees, client exit surveys)
- Ongoing evaluations to evaluate shelters.
- Matching data from Access to Housing with SMIS reports to track how many people remain housed
- Making SMIS mandatory in all shelters will enable client data sharing across the system
- Regular quality assurance assessments in shelters
- Audits and building condition assessments help us understand the state of our shelters and the facility index

Feedback on how to improve or clarify Outcome Statement #2:

- Define "high quality" and "safety" – what makes something high quality (people, spaces, both)? Safety can mean different things to different people
- People experiencing homelessness should provide input into this definition
- Don't all emergency shelters already offer housing supports?
- High quality is very difficult when there are too many people in each shelter
- Having more shelter spaces in Scarborough is the way to improve quality and decrease crowding downtown
- "Accessible" and "timely" should be added to this outcome statement
- Suggest to add "when needed" at the end of the outcome statement
- Define what "housing-focused" means
- What does housing-focused mean when there is not enough supportive and affordable housing available?
- Will access be equitable? Varied?
- SSHA really needs to commit to safety
- We cannot just use these words - need to actually commit to changing the system and operationalizing these words

Top actions to achieve this outcome statement identified through survey and virtual engagement sessions:		
1. Ensure that people experiencing homelessness are provided client-centred, high quality, housing focused services	2. Provide shelter and overnight accommodation that offers a safe, indoor space to people experiencing homelessness	3. Increase partnerships with health service providers, including harm reduction and mental health service providers, and improve coordination and integration of health services within shelter, 24-hour respite and outreach programs

Outcome Statement #3: Low-income households have access to housing benefit programs that provide affordability and stability.

Top milestones and measures needed to achieve this outcome statement:

Homelessness:

- Number of people experiencing homelessness is reduced as more people become housed
- Reduction in encampments and people sleeping outdoors as these groups are able to access benefits

Shelters:

- Significant reduction and reliance on the shelter system due to increased housing options and avoiding evictions, which would result in decreased shelter occupancy levels
- Stay in emergency beds would be brief – not to be used as actual housing
- Reduced number of people coming back into shelter system after moving into housing due to housing stability

Housing access:

- A realistic and achievable reduction in waitlist times for RGI housing (e.g., waitlist is reduced by "x"% in three years)
- Reduced wait times to receive approval status for housing benefits (e.g. housing allowances and COHB)
- Increase in the number of low-income households accessing housing benefits
- Increase in the total number of housing benefits distributed
- Increased number of landlords participating in programs
- The proportion of bricks and mortar units keeps pace with housing benefits to ensure ongoing balance between the two

Housing outcomes & supports:

- Increase in number of people who have secured housing
- Increased housing stability and decreased evictions
- Increase in number of households receiving follow-up supports to assist in maintaining housing
- Households have access to the support services they need
- Availability of long-tern follow-up supports

Other measures:

- There is streamlined communication about how low-income households access housing benefits
- Households have adequate income leftover for other necessities (e.g. food, childcare, etc.)

How we can track progress:		

- Creating a housing benefits dashboard that tracks benefit uptake by program type
- Yearly reporting from Access to Housing and housing benefits on a yearly basis
- Gather client or service provider feedback on accessibility and ability to navigate system

Feedback on how to improve or clarify Outcome Statement #3:		

- Define "affordability", "stability" and "housing benefit program"
- What is actually realistic to achieve in a three-year timeframe?
- The way it's written, it seems like access to housing benefits are all we need for affordability. We also need access to affordable rental supply and tenant rights.
- This outcome statement should apply to all housing program options (affordable, social, alternative, housing benefits, etc.) as well. This is about renters and tenants.
- This should apply to housing and housing benefit programs
- This outcome statement should focus on improving accessibility and removing barriers through a streamlined application process
- How can this apply in a low-barrier setting? (e.g. folks who don't provide their names or no ID)
- Recommend adding another outcome statement that reflects the capacity of the housing sector to provide safe, affordable housing that can grow.
- How do we define low-income? This is an opportunity for defining SSHA's role and responsibility in regard to the scope of our work and the impact of housing benefits.
- Definition of stability - what does stability mean for low-income households compared with formerly homeless people
- A lot of this outcome statement and milestones relate to provincial jurisdiction
- Define who we're serving
- Don't assume the benefits are the answer. Stop focusing on the private sector to provide affordable homes, since it's more expensive and less effective, build bricks and mortar affordable units as a central part of the plan.

Top actions to achieve this outcome statement identified through survey:		
1. Deliver portable housing benefits, including the housing allowance program and the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit program, in partnership with other	2. Maintain the affordability of non-profit housing by renegotiating new operating agreements	3. Develop and implement a transparent access system for new affordable rental housing opportunities and housing benefits which strategically aligns new housing opportunities with population specific needs and targets

orders of government, to improve housing stability and increase access to affordable housing		

4. Budget Priorities

The service plan engagement survey asked respondents to review SSHA's 2021 program budget and indicate the programs and funding areas that they would increase or decrease funding towards in order to meet the priorities identified in the service plan. These questions were also asked in all the virtual engagement sessions, where stakeholders were able to add more detailed comments about the specific activities or programs that additional funds could go towards as well as reflect on areas that could receive reduced funding. This input gathered from participants is a helpful source of feedback around the division's funding priorities and will be considered in future budgetary decisions. However, there are a multitude of other considerations and factors that must be taken into account for service planning and funding processes, thus, the feedback from these engagement sessions will not be the sole determining factor in developing the SSHA program budget.

In general, the need for more housing options as well as increased tools to move people into housing and supports to help keep people housed was a common theme throughout the engagement, and was reflected through the budgeting exercise. Specifically, most participants identified that funding could be increased towards community housing, housing with supports and housing benefits. Detailed comments on the specific activities or priorities that participants felt increased funding could go towards are summarized below:

Funding structure

- Fully fund all services that agencies are required to deliver under contract. (i.e. reduce need for agencies to supplement funding provided by SSHA through fundraising or finding other sources of funding)
- Funding for partner agencies should be fair, reasonable and meets overhead and staffing costs

Community housing

- Increase funding to programs that support a choice-based housing model for people exiting homelessness (i.e. support people exiting homelessness to live where they want to live)
- Increase funding toward alternative and supportive housing

- Increase funding to the development of rapid housing solutions to get people housed quickly (i.e. rapid rehousing initiative or modular housing)
- Fund supports, eviction prevention and tenant advocacy, preferably on-site through community housing, to assist tenant is staying housed
- Enhance funding to prevent RGI fraud
- Provide funding for enhanced technology to support better communication/oversight between City and housing providers
- Create a permanent program that provides municipal loan guarantees and capital contributions for non-profit acquisition
- Provide funding for housing providers to explore mergers, acquisitions, bulk purchasing (e.g. consulting, financing estimates)
- Provide flexible housing investments to providers (i.e. development as opposed to operational funding only)
- Look for alternative sources of funding outside of the SSHA budget (e.g. Section 37, inclusionary zoning)

Housing benefits

- Advocate for other orders of government to increase the availability of portable rent subsidies and benefits
- Open housing allowance eligibility for specific vulnerable groups who face housing stability challenges, such as those on the social housing waitlist, youth, VAW and those experiencing homelessness who do not quality under the chronic homelessness stream and need support to keep their housing.
- Advocate to other orders of government to create more flexible housing benefit programs that meet households' depth of affordability requirements
- Advocate for COHB funding beyond 2029
- Advocate for housing allowance funding beyond 2022
- Provide resources for data collection and analysis and improved software for processing referrals

Housing with supports

- Provide specific supports for daily living and living independently
- Provide a continuum of housing supports
- Provide mental health and addictions supports
- Provide greater access to follow up and wrap around supports for clients to help them maintain their housing
- Provide supports outside the GTA for people who want to move but are concerned they will lose their support system
- Provide population-specific, individualized supports for groups with specific needs (i.e. youth transitioning into the adult sector, people exiting the justice system)

- Fund additional/enhanced supports for those experiencing the highest rates of homelessness
- Use data-based decisions on what type of supportive housing is created and offered

Participants were challenged by the discussion around which programs could receive reduced funding, as services and programs were seen as critical or specialized services for clients. Precautions should be taken to ensure that there are no negative or harmful impacts to clients should program funding be reduced. In addition, services were seen as interlinked or interdependent on one another, often working together to provide and uphold a system of services for clients along a spectrum of needs. Many participants also shared feedback that they found viewing the budget from a scarcity lens to be counter-intuitive and an approach that may deter collaboration within the sector.

Participants focused the conversation away from a focus on reducing funding, and highlighted the opportunities to think more innovatively about how we fund and potential efficiencies we could leverage. A common theme arose about the need for the division to start thinking about flexible program models that will encourage self-sustainability. Participants also recommended that SSHA identify programs that could be funded or supported by other levels of government, different City divisions, and non-profit organizations or service providers. Specifically, participants encouraged looking for overlaps in existing programs that are being funded across different divisions or sectors to identify where SSHA may be creating redundancies in the system.

Feedback on Engagement Sessions

Virtual engagement participants were invited to anonymously share their final thoughts and feedback about the session and their experiences.

In general, participants shared positive feedback about the sessions. Many found the discussions and activities to be helpful, generative and thought-provoking. Participants also enjoyed the varied combination of engagement methods (e.g. polls, sticky notes, breakout groups). Participants shared their appreciation for the opportunity to provide their input and expressed that they would like to see future opportunities for sustained engagement.

Attendees also shared their suggestions for improving future engagements. Some participants said that the sessions could have been longer to allow more time for each activity. A few participants also would have appreciated more time to familiarize themselves with the engagement methods (i.e. Jamboard).

In general, engagement participants were challenged by the Budget Prioritization discussion questions. In particular, participants found it difficult to respond to the question around which programs or services they felt could receive reduced funding, as they deemed all programs providing basic needs are necessary and essential. Participants found the framing of this question to be potentially problematic, because they felt that approaching decision making through a scarcity lens could create competition between organizations, rather than promoting collaboration. For future funding-related discussions, participants would have appreciated more information to be able to make an informed comment.

Next Steps

The development of SSHA's Service Plan will take place during the summer of 2021 with the feedback outlined in this report in addition to other key inputs, including results from engaging with people experiencing homelessness through the 2021 Street Needs Assessment. The Service Plan will be presented to Committee and Council in October 2021.